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COMMUNITY SPREAD OF COVID IN SOME STATES, ADMITS GOVT

The Centre for the first time admitted on Sunday that the dreaded community spread has occurred in some states

LIMITED TO CERTAIN DISTRICTS: HARSH VARDHAN

Union health minister Harsh Vardhan said, "Community transmission is limited to certain districts, occurring in a limited number of states." In pockets of various states, including West Bengal, community transmission is "expected to occur", especially in dense areas, the minister said. On virus mutation, Vardhan said it has not been detected in India as yet | P7

'KERALA PAYING PRICE FOR NEGLIGENCE'

- The minister criticised Kerala for its spike in virus cases, saying the state is paying "the price for gross negligence" during Onam
- He said Kerala's experience ought to serve as "a good lesson" for all the state govts, especially in view of the looming festival season. He urged people to follow Covid-19 guidelines religiously

61,871

FRESH CORONAVIRUS CASES REPORTED IN INDIA ON SUNDAY

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARWAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

EXPRESS READ

Govt unlikely to extend credit plan for MSMEs

New Delhi: The government is unlikely to extend the Rs 3 lakh crore-Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) for the MSME sector beyond October even though the sanctioned amount so far is only nearly 65 per cent of the target, according to sources.

CRPF man, civilian hurt in grenade attack in J&K

Srinagar: A CRPF assistant sub-inspector and a civilian were injured as militants hurled a grenade at security forces in Pulwama, Jammu and Kashmir, on Sunday. ASI Asim Ali and a civilian, Mehraj-ud-Din Sheikh, sustained minor injuries.

Man kills one, injures 5 in stabbing spree in B'luru

Bengaluru: A man, suspected to be mentally unstable, went on a stabbing spree on the streets of West Bengaluru on Sunday, killing one and injuring five others. M Ganesh, aged about 35 years, and a daily-wage worker has been arrested. The deceased Maari (30) was also a labourer. P5

WITH THIS ISSUE

THE ESSENTIAL CAMPUS DIGEST edex

32 PAGES, INCLUDING 16 OF edex (TABLOID) & 4 of City Express

Anxious villagers watch as the water level in the Bhima river rises at the Devalgaon bridge in Azfalpur taluk in Kalaburagi district on Sunday | KPN

N-K'TAKA STILL IN FLOOD GRIP

The flood situation remained grim on Sunday in four districts of Karnataka with the Krishna and Bhima rivers in spate. A total of 111 villages in Kalaburagi, Yadgir, Raichur and Vijayapura districts have been affected by the floods, caused by heavy rain and water released from dams in Maharashtra. CM B S Yediyurappa will undertake an aerial survey of the affected districts on Wednesday | P4

Difficult time for democracy: Cong

Sonia assails the Centre, says it is bartering away people's interests to crony capitalists

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

LAUNCHING a broadside against the Centre, Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Sunday said it was systematically bartering away the interests of citizens at the altar of profiteering by a handful of crony capitalists, hurting the Constitution and India's democratic traditions.

Nearly 14 crore jobs have been lost. SMEs, small shopkeepers and other small enterprises are shutting, yet the government remains a mute spectator

Sonia Gandhi

In her first address to party general secretaries, in-charges as also members and invitees of the reconstituted Congress Working Committee, she urged the cadre to defeat the autocratic designs of the ruling BJP. "Your responsibility is even more onerous as our democracy is passing through its most tumultuous times," she emphasised.

Referring to the party's campaign against the farm reform laws, Sonia said: "The current BJP government has attacked the very foundation of our resilient agrarian economy by bringing in three anti-agriculture black laws. A conspiracy has been hatched to defeat the gains of the 'Green Revolution'."

Claiming that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had no strategic thinking on tackling Covid-19, she said the stark truth is that a PM who promised to defeat corona within 21 days, has abdicated responsibility towards the citizens.

The government has simultaneously demolished the economy, she alleged. "Today, the young have no jobs. Nearly 14 crore jobs have been lost. SMEs, small shopkeepers and other small enterprises are shutting, yet the government remains a mute spectator."

20,000 vacancies cripple K'taka police

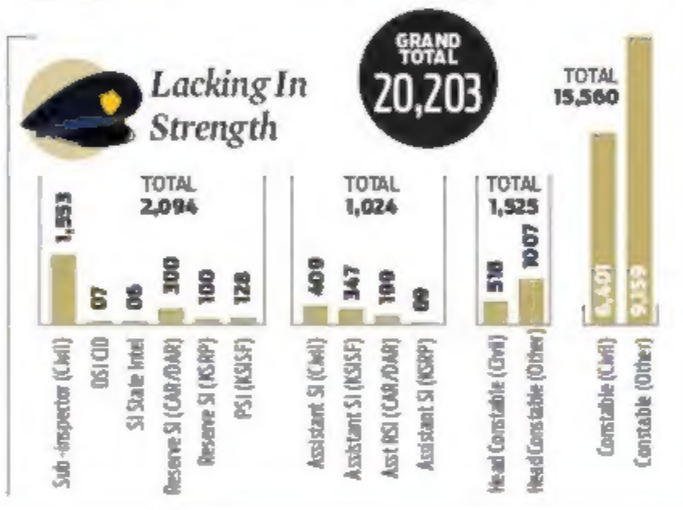
BANSY KALAPPA @ Bengaluru

THE Karnataka State Police force has been stretched beyond its capacities with a huge shortage of over 20,000 personnel in various ranks, the bulk of vacancies being at the crucial constabulary level. The Covid-19 situation has only made matters worse with no recruitment happening.

The police force, at present, has a total of 20,203 unfilled vacancies, with 15,560 of them in the constabulary, which can hamper anti-terror operations, intelligence gathering, anti-Naxal and other sensitive operations. The police force has been traditionally about 1.08 lakh-strong, and posts falling vacant due to retirement of personnel were filled up with regular recruitment drives.

Recruitment is usually conducted for four levels — Constable, Sub-Inspector, Deputy Superintendent and Superintendent of Police — but this has been frozen for now, leaving the force with a huge shortage of personnel for many months now.

Retired officers and experts pointed out that, given the current situation, the personnel are overworked and overburdened. CONTINUED ON: P5



K'TAKA COVID-19 BATTLE

7,012 Positive cases on Sunday

1,09,264 Active cases so far

10,478 TOTAL DEATHS

6,45,825 TOTAL RECOVERIES

7,65,586 TOTAL CASES

• FULL COVERAGE P3

Firms fleecing us on oxygen, say pvt hospitals

RANJANI MADHAVAN @ Bengaluru

OXYGEN manufacturers are asking hospitals to cough up higher prices for medical oxygen, and are threatening to stop supply if they do not pay the increased rates, according to the Private Hospitals and Nursing Homes Association (PHANA).

The association has written to the Drugs Controller of the state Drugs Control Department on October 14 complaining about abnormal and exorbitant increase in prices of oxygen supplied to hospitals by manufacturers, during the Covid-19 pandemic. While there is no shortage of oxygen supply now, as was the case in August, the issue now is with the pricing.

The letter also stated that the prices quoted by the manufacturers is higher than that fixed by the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority. "This is to bring to your notice that M/s Praxair/Linde have increased the prices for supply of liquid medical oxygen and oxygen cylinders to hospitals. The existing price is Rs 16 per cubic metre plus Rs 5 freight charges and 12 per cent taxes, which adds up to Rs 23.52. The revised price is Rs 16 plus Rs 5 plus, an extra Rs 15, and 12 per cent tax, which adds up to Rs 40.32," the letter signed by Dr R Ravindra, president of PHANA, reads.

The letter cites a gazette notification by the Department of Pharmaceuticals under the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers, dated September 25, which has capped the price of liquid medical oxygen at Rs 15.22 per cubic metre and that of oxygen inhalation medicinal gas in cylinder at Rs 25.71 per cubic metre. CONTINUED ON: P5

BIHAR ELECTIONS

Few takers for buses & choppers, LED TVs a rage

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR @ Patna

THIS election season, Bihar is missing its VIP choppers as well as hordes of buses used for ferrying crowds to political rallies. The traditional 'business' of elections has almost come to a halt as the state goes to polls amid the pandemic. Yet, guess who is happy? The LED TV and screen shop owners, as virtual rallies have made a smart entry into the scene.

In the 2015 Assembly polls, 32 helicopters were booked by political parties, including 16 by the BJP. This time around, only 11 have been hired — six by BJP and the rest by the JD(U) and others. "Party rallies are limited for the three-phase polls. The focus is on virtual rallies through digital platforms," says a senior BJP leader. Money thus saved is being used for renting big LED screens and other platforms, he adds.

A single-engine helicopter is available for hire anywhere between ₹80,000 and 1.5 lakh per hour depending on its seating capacity. Hiring a twin-engine chopper can cost around ₹4 lakh. At present, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and BJP chief JP Nadda are the only ones travelling by helicopters to address rallies.

Uday Kumar Singh, president of Bihar Motor Transporters Federation, says virtual rallies have reduced the bus renting business to almost 2% compared with the 2015 and 2019 elections. Compared to around 35,000 big passenger buses hired in 2015 polls and 40,000 in the 2019 elections, this time, just 100 buses have been booked so far. "This year, hardly any party has approached us for buses," says Singh. P8

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DASARA DAMPENER

Flowers? Out of reach this festive season

Buyers crowd around a jasmine vendor at a market in Mysuru on Sunday. The price of the flower has hit a high in recent days | UDAYSHANKAR S

K SHIVA KUMAR @Mysuru

THIS festival season, the flowers, which are essential for puja and decorations, seem to be out of the reach of consumers. The price of the fragrant Mysuru Mallige (jasmine) and other flowers have gone up four to five times. The skyrocketing prices are worrying both the consumers and the vendors.

Jasmine which was sold at Rs 250 per kg is now a prohibitive Rs 1,500. The price of Kanakambara has jumped four times -- from Rs 200 per kg last week to Rs 800 on Sunday. Rose too which was sold at Rs 20 per kg is now Rs 240. And the gloomy news is that the prices are expected to further shoot up on Ayudha Puja and Vijayadashami when the demand will outstrip supply.

Marigold and chrysanthemum are in great demand too on Ayudha Puja. These flowers, grown extensively in Panadavapura, KR Pet, Nagamanagala and Malvalli, are also destroyed by heavy rains and the resultant waterlogging in the fields.

The farmers are not benefiting either. In fact, during April and May, every day, desperate flower farmers plucked around 60 lakh flowers and threw them away. This was because they had no takers due to the strict nationwide containment measures amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Today, the farmers are in a similar situation as the rains have destroyed the crop. CONTINUED ON: P2